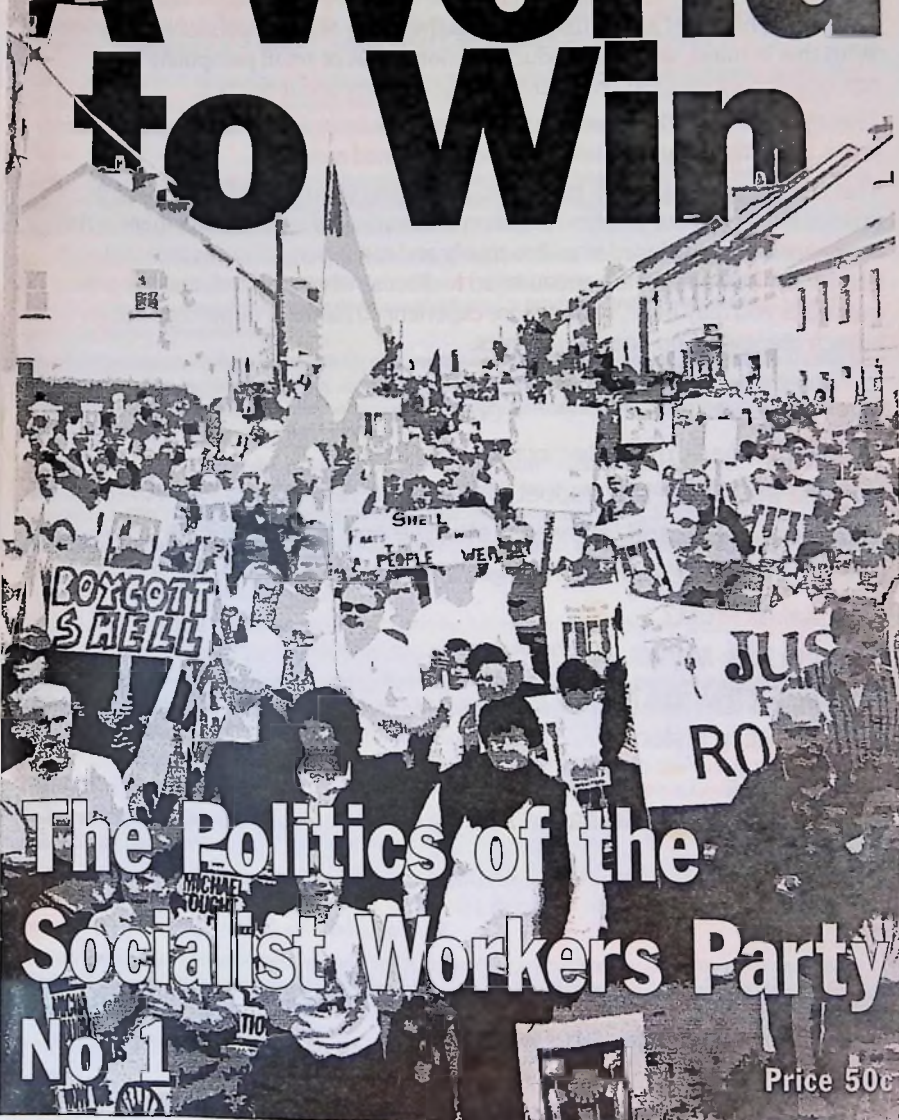


A World to Win



The Politics of the
Socialist Workers Party

No 1

Price 50c

Those joining the Socialist Workers Party naturally want to know about our full range of politics. Many publications and books are available through the SWP and its sister organisations around the world and on the web. As well as this our branches feature regular political discussions and occasional educational.

But people are busy and may not have time to rapidly digest many books and periodicals but want to familiarise themselves with our core politics nonetheless. With this in mind, we have produced a short series of small pamphlets reproducing articles which cover the main outlines of our politics.

These pamphlets will be useful, we hope, to those who have recently joined the party, those thinking of joining and even seasoned members.

This is the first pamphlet of the series. It contains what we hope are accessible articles from with our political tradition on a variety of topics. Two others in this series are being produced simultaneously and more may follow as the need and demand indicates. You are encouraged to discuss what you read, and ask any questions you may have, with a more experienced member or perhaps ask for a branch discussion on one of the topics.

Contents:

Socialism means more democracy—not less	3
How the Irish State is a puppet for Shell	4
James Connolly's anti-imperialist struggle and socialist ideals	6
Who makes profit: workers or capital?	8
Who Makes Profit?	9
Does the Free Market work?	11
What about 'Human Nature'?	13
Understanding history	15
Class struggle	19
Working Class or Multitude	22

Published January 2006 by Socialist Workers Party, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8
Tel (01) 872 2682 Email info@swo.ie Web www.swp.ie

Socialism means more democracy—not less

*Published in the Irish Times, 6th December
Socialism is neither dead nor the property of the Taoiseach, writes Kieran Allen. Real socialists would tackle land speculators around Dublin.*

What a strange world. Bertie Ahern has found "socialism" and with the zeal of a convert keeps mentioning it in media interviews. Yet former radicals like Patrick O'Dea (Irish Times, December 2nd) cannot stop recanting. He wants a decent "funeral, burial or cremation" because, as a good social worker,—he needs a "letting-go ritual".

Bertie Ahern may be a political novice in dialectical theorising—but at least he recognises that socialism did not die in 1989. The regimes of eastern Europe were based on dictatorship, brutality and super-exploitation. Socialism means more democracy, not less.

Under capitalism we vote every four or five years on how "to run the country"—but democracy then stops at the office or factory door. If, flushed with enthusiasm for the democratic process, you dare to suggest that the workers in your job might take some decisions about what is produced and by what method, you will quickly be shown that same door.

Patrick O'Dea must have been acting out his own caricature when he stood outside McDonald's shouting "Down with bunburger ideology". More serious socialists joined picket lines there when workers were denied a right to join a union—just as they also stood outside the Russian embassy to support free independent trade unions such as Solidarnosc.

Instead of belonging to either camp during the Cold War, Socialist Worker ran a masthead: "Neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism." Mr O'Dea thinks we need to embrace the market. But which market? Of the 100 top economic units in the world economy today, 51 are firms.

Companies like General Motors are bigger than whole countries such as Ireland or South Africa. These corporations have the power to subvert democracy, to shape economies and, crucially, to do deals with each other to carve up the markets.

When water companies bid to take over a public service, few people realise that the same firms which act as rivals in one country, co-operate in another country to put in similar bids.

The concentration of wealth means that large firms often blackmail states to get big handouts of "corporate welfare". Remember how Irish taxpayers kept funding the AIB bank after it got into a little difficulty through speculating on the London insurance market.

Adam Smith's days of the "free" market are well and truly over. Real existing capitalism, as distinct from the idealised image found in economics textbooks, brings a fusion of political and economic elites.

Corporations, quite literally, buy political power to enforce a regime of low taxation on profits and hidden subsidies for themselves.

The result is a world of inequalities that have never been dreamt of before. Today three billionaires own more than the population of sub-Saharan Africa. In 1960, the ratio of income of the global wealthy to the poor was 30 to one. But by 1989, this had risen to 59.

Within the advanced Western economies, the gap between rich and poor has also grown. According to Business Week, a CEO earned roughly 40 times the wage of the average employee in 1960—today the gap has widened to 600 times.

In Ireland there has been a redistribution of wealth—to the wealthy. About 10 per cent of the national

income has been redistributed to those who control profits, dividends and rent.

No wonder that our pint-drinking Taoiseach has started to get the message. The glaring inequalities have become just too hard to hide. Socialists may not get huge votes but the causes they champion—opposition to war, to bin charges, a return to strong unions—are popular. As a skilled political opportunist, Bertie senses that the “times they are a changing”—again.

But he will have to do a little more to prove his socialist credentials. As a novice to left-wing causes, we can, perhaps, excuse his initial definition of socialism—namely that the rich and poor have an equal right to enjoy the state-owned Botanical Gardens.

If such a right exists, surely there is an even more powerful right to housing. Yet Mr Ahern's Government has cut back on social housing and left many at the mercy of the market forces that pushed prices beyond their reach. Real socialists would tackle the handful of speculators who control the land banks around Dublin. If ever there was a case for nationalisation, this is it.

Nor would real socialists tolerate a situation where medical treatment depends on the size of your wallet. Socialism surely means universal free healthcare—paid for through taxes on wealth.

Bertie may want to trumpet his more “caring image” by boasting that workers on the minimum wage will no longer pay tax. But real socialists ask the more fundamental question: why are one-third of Irish workers receiving just the minimum wage? After all, workers created the Celtic Tiger by giving record levels of productivity. Isn't it time to end gross exploitation and take key sectors of the economy, such as the banks, into public ownership?

Finally, when the very planet itself is in danger, a real socialist Taoiseach would not allow Ireland to so recklessly disregard the Kyoto treaty by spewing carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Environmental problems cannot be tackled through competition and greed—our very survival as a species requires planning and co-operation. The left tide is coming back—and Bertie will have to keep running to stay ahead.

Kieran Allen is a UCD lecturer in sociology, Socialist Worker 20.07.2005—05.08.2005 #245

How the Irish State is a puppet for Shell

This titanic battle, which has brought the anti-capitalist message to a mass audience, began over health and safety. A consortium led by Shell but also including Statoil and Marathon proposed to build a pipeline complex that will run over 8 kilometres of land.

The complex includes an upstream pipeline which brings the gas from the sea to the terminal; a downstream pipeline which takes the discharge out into the sea; and an ‘umbilical cord’ containing cleansing acids, power lines and hydraulic fluids to control the mechanical valve system.

Normally, gas is processed out at sea on huge platforms and even the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources Noel Dempsey has admitted the pipeline is ‘unique both in Ireland and Europe’. The length of the pipeline means it has to run at exceptionally high pressures.

The pipeline will be 70 metres from local houses, passing sometimes through unstable bog. It will also be in the same trench as the umbilical cord, containing materials travelling at even higher pressures. The gas is still wet, corrosive and has to pass through several 90 degree angles where the risk of a rupture increases.

These plans caused alarm in Pollthomais, Bellanaboy, and Rosspoint. Pipeline accidents are uncommon but

do occur. In 2004 twenty-one people died in a gas pipeline explosion in Ghislenghien in Belgium and in August 2000, twelve people died in New Mexico when an underground natural gas pipeline ruptured.

The Puppet State

Bertie Ahern was described by Charlie Haughey as the most cunning and devious of them all. He has certainly worked tirelessly behind the scenes to facilitate Shell.

The saga of Ireland's subservience to the energy corporations began in the late 1960s when Marathon Oil was granted a licence that effectively gave it control of the south coast of Ireland for the nominal sum of just €635. It then went on to discover large quantities of natural gas off the Kinsale Head.

After this debacle, Justin Keating the Labour Minister for Industry and Commerce in 1975, introduced more stringent exploration terms, including a tax rate of 50 percent on profits; an automatic 50 percent stake for the state in any commercial wells and royalties of 6 percent. Due to a slowdown in worldwide exploration and production, this was modified in 1985. However in 1987, a fundamental change occurred when Ray Burke became Minister for Energy.

Burke entered into private negotiations with Marathon executives against the advice of top government officials. In discussions about the price of gas from Kinsale, he told a senior official that he was to give Marathon ‘whatever they were asking for’. More generally, he abolished the requirement that the state have a 50 percent stake in any commercial project and that royalties be received. He also introduced a facility whereby exploration expenses could be written off against tax.

Subsequently, Ray Burke was branded the recipient of corrupt payments to the tune of £200,000 by the Flood Tribunal. With a Minister with this appalling record, the Irish people had little defence against the oil companies.

However, even more crucial concessions came in 1992 when Bertie Ahern was Minister for Finance. In the Finance Act of that year, the corporation tax rate on oil and gas production was reduced to 25 percent, the lowest in the world. The companies were also allowed to write off all costs going back for 25 years. (By way of contrast, tax on oil profits in Norway was set at 78 percent.)

The sheer scale of the potential profits and the need to have a friendly relationship with local states, mean that oil and gas companies devote considerable resources to lobbying politicians.

Shell, the principal company involved, spent \$28 million and employed 120 lobbyists between 1998 and 2003 to promote its interests with the US federal government while Marathon has spent €29.1 million. At least in the US, one can track these activities whereas in Ireland lobbying takes a far less open form. Marathon Oil, however, has contributed to Fianna Fail and Enterprise Oil has hosted the Fianna Fail fund raising event at the Galway races.

Yet even without these direct donations, oil companies exercise a considerable influence over the Irish government. Their control of vast resources, technology and expertise and their close ties to the power of the US state, means that they have leverage over Irish politicians. That, at least, is the only plausible explanation why the Irish state has gone to extraordinary lengths to look after their interests in Mayo.

The state owned forestry company, Coillte, sold over 400 acres to the consortium, as a site for the oil refinery. Bord Gais, the state owned gas company, is building a special extension to the national grid at a cost of €200 million to get gas from the Corrib field. The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, held a special meeting with the President of Shell to encourage the company to re-apply when its first planning application was rejected. A government Minister also travelled to the area to mobilise support for the project. Special legislation was put in place to impose compulsory acquisition of land for the pipeline and, in effect, the project was split so that planning permission was only required for the refinery rather than the pipeline. Even more bizarrely, the ‘independent’ consultancy firm that was hired to do a quantified risk assessment of the pipeline was part owned by Shell.

As if that was not enough, no government agency has yet taken full responsibility for the pipeline. The Health and Safety Authority claim they have no responsibility. Instead, permission for the pipeline and its

operation are the sole preserve of the Minister for Marine and Natural Resources under the foreshore and gas Acts. The catch, however, is that the pipeline cannot be regarded as being part of the 'foreshore' because it will run 8 kilometres inland.

Behind all the bureaucratic manoeuvring is a strategy to give the Petroleum Affairs Division (PAD) a free hand. This is a unit inside the Department of Marine and Natural Resources which has close ties to the energy corporations. The former Statoil executive, Mike Cunningham, who has joined the campaign for the Rosspoint Five says that no press release was issued by the PAD until it was first shown to the oil and gas companies.

Behind the scenes, then, Ahern has manoeuvred to hand over Ireland's natural resources to the corporations. If this were Bolivia, he would have been thrown out of office by now. Hopefully the Bolivian spirit is coming to Mayo.

People Power Will Win

Three thousand people marched in Belmullet to demand the release of the Rosspoint Five. But two Maymen were conspicuous by their absence—Pat Rabbitte, the leader of the Labour Party and Enda Kenny, the leader of Fine Gael. Both have run a mile from the whole issue. The leaders of the 'alternative' government do not want to upset the corporations. They want to be the B team in the puppet play. The battle to defeat Shell therefore depends of the full use of people power.

Despite all the doomsayers, huge demonstrations have a powerful effect. The demonstrations in Belmullet and Castlebar, for example, have helped to win the whole of Mayo to the campaign. The same needs to be repeated in Dublin and throughout the country. The stakes are enormously high. Defeating this government will require an escalation to the level of mass civil disobedience. This is our task.

Inspiration for today: James Connolly's anti-imperialist struggle and socialist ideals

James Connolly's life has become literally the stuff of legend and has been celebrated in literature, historical accounts and song. The image of the dying Connolly, strapped to a chair and mercilessly shot after the 1916 rising by a British government egged on by the Irish Independent, is a powerful and evocative one.

Connolly has been enshrined in our orthodox Irish history as an 'Irish Patriot' who did his bit in Easter Week for Irish freedom. However the real story of Connolly and how he ended up as a signatory of the Proclamation leading the rebels into the GPO on Easter Monday 89 years ago is a more complex one than that.

Connolly, unlike the other signatories of the Proclamation, was a Marxist and a socialist activist for almost three decades in Scotland, Ireland, America and Britain. He had spent his life trying to form socialist parties and pushing the cause of social revolution for the working class.

War

Faced with the obscenity of capitalist war on the battlefields of Europe at the beginning of the First World War in 1914, Connolly was shaken by the failure of the major socialist parties of Europe to stand up against this imperialist conflict. The reformist socialist parties across Europe supported the conflict after talking for

years about 'internationalism' and 'class solidarity'.

With little organisation around him, Connolly became increasingly convinced of the need for a military blow to be struck against British Imperialism in Ireland while Britain's troops were engaged in war on the continent. Unlike the period of the Boer War two decades previously, there was at least a section of the republican movement who were now sufficiently armed and in favour of taking action against the British authorities in Ireland.

Working closely with Padraig Pearse, Connolly and a minority of the nationalist movement joined forces in the 1916 Rising. While viewed by many historians as a foolhardy military uprising inspired by thoughts of 'blood sacrifice', the Rising was, for Connolly at least, a logical reaction to the presence in Ireland of a capitalist Empire that had politically and ethically lost its right to exist for many years and had confirmed its inherent inhumanity on the fields of the Somme and elsewhere.

Our class

Connolly rallied against those who called the First World War a war for civilisation.

"The carnival of murder on the continent will be remembered as a nightmare in the future, will not have the slightest effect in deciding for good the fate of our homes, our wages, our hours, our conditions. But the victories of labour in Ireland will be as footholds, secure and firm, in the upward climb of our class to the fullness and enjoyment of all that labour creates, and organised society can provide. Truly, labour alone in these days is fighting the real war for civilisation."

The Rising failed and alongside Connolly, many of the other nationalist leaders of the rising were also executed. This led left-wingers then and since to question how a strong socialist like Connolly could have died in what seemed like nothing more than a nationalist uprising.

Yet some in the international socialist movement did understand the reasons for the Rising. Lenin for one praised the bravery of the rebels of 1916, adding that the Rising had taken place too early for the rest of the European revolution, and was thus left isolated. He rejected those socialists who had written of the Rising as nothing more than a 'putsch' and argued that socialists must support any sort of rebellion that dealt a blow to imperialism, even one not led by socialists:

"To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts of small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc—to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution."

Whatever about the bravery and the blow against British Imperialism there can be little doubt that Connolly had lowered the red flag somewhat during 1916. He went into the rising in a weak position having no political organisation built up around himself, apart from the small number of volunteers in his workers' militia, the Irish Citizen Army. The origins of this lack of organisation, a political party that shared his own political views and beliefs, can be traced back two decades. However it was Connolly's strong stance against Imperialism that led him to take up arms on Easter Week.

Resistance to Imperialism

James Connolly was still a young political activist when the Boer War began in 1899. The conflict and the anti-war movement that was launched in Ireland saw Connolly having to grapple with many of the issues that the present Anti War Movement has had to deal with. Just like the Iraqi war, the drive to violence was fuelled by the pursuit of resources, this time diamonds and gold rather than oil.

Relations between the Dutch settlers, the Boers, and the British rapidly disintegrated following the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa until war broke out in 1899. The Boers were finally defeated in 1902, but not before major losses were suffered by both sides.

The Boer War was the first major international conflict that Connolly had to take a political stance on and he made his views very clear both in theory and in practice.

The 'anti-imperialist' line that he held and the support he gave to the Boer resistance came from his own position that saw the violence and misery produced by international wars, as a fundamental consequence of the continued growth of international capitalism.

Like some who argue now that the Iraqi resistance should not be supported because they are 'Islamic fundamentalists', many at the time argued that the Boer resistance should not be celebrated because of their religious and political beliefs. Connolly completely rejected this stance.

Connolly supported the Boers, not because of their inherent politics but in spite of them—indeed the politicians of the Transvaal Republics, many of whom were conservative, Calvinists and racist towards the African natives, hardly made them natural allies of a radical socialist. The British were to be opposed, because, to take a stand against the British Empire was to take a stand against imperialism and the forces of capitalism. A military defeat for the British Empire in Southern Africa would not just be a blow for British capitalism and a victory for the people of the Transvaal Republics, but would also move forward the cause of progressive politics in Britain.

Connolly argued "that as colonial expansion and the conquest of new markets are necessary for the prolongation of the life of capitalism, the prevention of colonial expansion and the loss of markets to countries capitalistically developed, such as England, precipitates economic crises there, and so gives an impulse to revolutionary thought and helps to shorten the period required to develop backward countries and thus prepare the economic conditions needed for our triumph."

Mass movement

Showing that their ideas did not just remain in the realm of theory, Connolly began to campaign actively against the war and attempted to build a mass movement in opposition to the conflict. Connolly worked closely with Republican groups in opposition to the war within the newly established Irish Transvaal Committee. A number of public demonstrations were also held in Dublin against the aggression of the British Empire and calling for a victory for the Boers. A meeting later in 1899 in College Green attracted an impressive crowd of some 2,000 and was attended by Maud Gonne.

Connolly flew the flag of anti-imperialism throughout the period of the conflict and made the connection between imperialism, capitalism and war, a connection that many socialists in Britain and on Continental Europe had failed to make.

If he were alive today he would undoubtedly support the Iraqi resistance, oppose the use of Shannon and be an active member of the Irish Anti War Movement.

Who makes profit: workers or capital?

By Kieran Allen

THE Irish government recently tried to hand Intel Corporation a cheque for €170 million and very few politicians objected. There is not supposed to be enough money for public services, but here was a huge hand-out to a company which made €1.7 billion in profits. The dominant consensus of Irish politicians is that multi-nationals give us jobs—and so we must be grateful.

But maybe it's the multi-nationals who should be 'grateful' to Irish workers for creating their profits.

In the nineteenth century Karl Marx explained exactly how this occurred in a pamphlet called 'Wage Labour and Capital'.

Capitalism is based on commodities—goods produced for the market where the prices vary. But on what

basis do prices change?

Following the classical economists, Marx argued that prices tend to vary around a mid point which they denoted as 'value'. The value is set by the amount of 'socially necessary labour' that is embodied in the commodity. If the average Intel chip took five hours to make compared to one hour for fashionable jeans, then it is five times more valuable.

Of course, in some sectors goods can trade above their value for a period—and Intel is precisely a case in point. Up until recently, it has had a virtual monopoly but the super-profits in this sector have attracted in other capitalists such as Advanced Micro Devices, so producing an over-supply of chips and thus reducing the price.

The labour theory of value therefore applies in the long run.

What then determines the value of labour itself? In a capitalist economy, labour is a commodity that is bought and sold like any other. Its price—or wages—also varies according to the laws of supply and demand.

But again, broadly, its value is set by the necessity to keep the worker alive and giving them enough money to survive.

However, whether the wages are relatively high or low, a fundamentally unequal exchange occurs.

A company such as Intel pays a definite wage that is set by the current labour market—but the worker agrees to sell an indefinite commodity, their labour power.

Intel does not pay out €500 a week and then bargains about whether employees will give them a 60 or 80 percent effort.

It assumes that the entire employee's labour power will be available to them for eight hours a day.

But a worker will probably do the equivalent of their wages in the first couple of hours at work. The rest of the day is 'surplus' to Intel, this is where they make their profits.

Intel can intensify production methods so that the worker creates the equivalent value in micro chips as their wages in the first half hour rather than hour.

Marx refers to this as the drive for relative surplus value or, more simply, work intensification. In a recently survey in Britain, two thirds of workers said their work had intensified in the previous year.

The investors who own Intel understand this process very well. They have enjoyed super-profits for some time but are now worried about growing inventories—unsold chips—and greater competition in areas like flash memory chips for mobile phones. So they focus more on 'gross margins' rather than sales figures, complaining that the Intel gross margin has fallen from 64% to 60%. The 'gross margin' is one indicator—by no means accurate—of the amount of surplus value they pump out of every worker.

Intel workers can therefore expect new efforts to intensify their work and cut back on labour costs.

Telling them to be grateful to their company is literally adding insult to injury.

Who Makes Profit?

By Kieran Allen

THE Irish government recently tried to hand Intel Corporation a cheque for €170 million and very few politicians objected. There is not supposed to be enough money for public services, but here was a huge hand-out to a company which made €1.7 billion in profits. The dominant consensus of Irish politicians is that multi-nationals give us jobs—and so we must be grateful.

does not make it go away—it merely means that you take the side of the dominant group. How else can we explain why no Irish economist has ever advocated a rise in wages to combat poverty or the provision of free schools meals which might be financed through taxes on wealth?

Second, the pricing mechanism does not work in the way economists claim. There can be time delays between price signals going out—and actual production coming on stream. If there is a scarcity of food, the price of food should rise and this should encourage more farmers to grow particular crops. However, it may take several months for such crops to ripen—by which time many may have starved!

Pricing mechanisms are supposed to encourage a competitive environment and this in turn is supposed to lead to efficiency. But how can there be 'efficiency' when some costs are loaded onto to society at large rather than on to the individual producers. Tobacco or car companies may compete vigorously and reduce their 'costs' to the bare minimum. Yet the real costs of their particular products also include hospital treatments for cancer patients and crash victims. These 'external' costs however are not borne by the companies—but are loaded onto society.

Third, mainstream economics offer no theoretical explanation for the business cycle. If market mechanisms naturally reach equilibrium, there should be no business cycle but the reality is that the boom-slump pattern has returned to global capitalism. Monetarism arose after the first global slump in 1973 when it was argued that the welfare state and government spending were the underlying cause of the problem. Yet despite the implementation of Milton Friedman's theories, the boom-slump cycle has continued.

Recessions arise from the unplanned nature of capitalism. Each capitalist seeks to reduce costs to defeat their rivals and the first who cuts back on 'labour costs' tends to be quite successful but others will soon follow their example. This, in turn, leads to a reduction in consumer spending. We therefore have this contradiction at the heart of the system: each company seeks to sell more goods but the more successful they collectively are in reducing costs, the more they shrink their own market.

Another route into recession comes from the way prices rise in boom. When an economy is full throttle, the price of labour, raw materials and energy rises. The reason is that no one planned in advance to take on more apprentices or ensure there was adequate supplies of raw material and energy. So at a certain point, they rise so much that some companies are driven into bankruptcy and this can produce a knock on effect, triggering off a recession.

Fourthly, monetarists often portray an idealized picture of the market that is completely at variance with reality. Theoretically, companies are supposed to function as 'price takers' on the market because the overall size of the market dwarves each individual competitor and none can dominate it. Yet this is patently false. In modern capitalism, a few global corporations dominate different sectors of the economy. They form world wide oligopolies which carve the market up between them. So waste and water companies apparently compete in one country—but in a different country they put in joint bids. The large corporations often seek to entrap customers by setting technical standards which cut out rivals; they bribe state officials; they spend vast sums on advertising to blot out their rivals. Far from competing on the basis of price, they use all sort of strong arm tactics to gain advantage over each other.

Actually existing capitalism is therefore very different from the abstract models of the market painted by conventional economists. Far from accepting economists as the new priesthood who have special line to the Truth, we should question them at every turn. Otherwise, they will be soon putting a price on your internal organs!

1 G. Becker, 'Latin America owes a lot to its 'Chicago Boys' Business Week June 9 1997 p 22

2G. Becke and J. Elias, 'Introducing Incentives in the market for live and Cadaveric Organ Donations' Paper presented to Living Donor Organ Transplantation Conference, Essen Germany 2002.

What about 'Human Nature'?

Phil Gasper looks at one of the most common objections to socialism.

PEOPLE WHO want to end the exploitation, oppression, poverty and war characteristic of modern capitalist society are regularly told that fundamental change is impossible because of human nature. War? It's human nature to fight. Racism? It's human nature to fear "outsiders." Women's oppression? Men and women are "naturally different."

Human nature is also said to make socialism impossible. Human beings, it is claimed, are naturally selfish, competitive and aggressive. Thus, a classless society based on cooperation and equality can't be built.

But is there any evidence that these familiar claims about human nature are actually true? Sweeping claims about human nature are often made on the basis of evolutionary biology—that is, science's understanding of how human beings, like other species of animals, have evolved and changed over time.

In the 1970s, the Harvard scientist Edward Wilson launched sociobiology, claiming that certain forms of human behavior are universal, and that the best explanation for them is that they are coded for in our genes. Wilson suggested that there were genes for entrepreneurship, aggression, spite, conformity, xenophobia, gender roles and much more.

He speculated that "the genetic bias is intense enough to cause a substantial division of labor, even in the most free and egalitarian of future societies...Even with identical education and equal access to all professions, men are likely to play a disproportionate role in political life, business, and science."

Concerning Marxism in particular, Wilson reportedly joked, "Wonderful theory. Wrong species." But almost none of the behaviors that Wilson claimed to be universal really are, since human societies exhibit enormous variations.

For example, the anthropologist Peggy Sanday conducted a survey of about 150 different societies going back close to 3,000 years to see whether they were male-dominated, female-dominated or based on collective decision-making. She found a huge diversity of sex roles in these societies—showing that such roles derive not from human nature, but "from the historical and political circumstances in which people find themselves."

The idea that violence and war have always been part of human society may seem like common sense. But the historical evidence reveals a very different picture. According to the Rutgers anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson, "The global archaeological record contradicts the idea that war was always a feature of human existence; instead, the record shows that warfare is largely a development of the past 10,000 years."

Ferguson argues that warfare became a feature of human society only as a consequence of specific historical developments, including the establishment of permanent settlements with accumulated wealth and the emergence of "social hierarchy, an elite, perhaps with its own interests and rivalries." Rather than war being the expression of some general human propensity to violence, war reflects the interests of those at the top of society who are most likely to benefit from it.

Claims similar to the ones made by Wilson have been revived more recently by self-styled "evolutionary psychologists," such as MIT scientist Steven Pinker. Pinker attacks "Marxists, academic feminists and café intellectuals" and claims that "[t]he standard Marxist theory of human nature has probably been refuted by...the anthropological record and Darwinian theory."

By the Marxist theory of human nature, Pinker means the view that human behavior depends on the historical and social circumstances in which people live. Instead, Pinker claims that inequality and conflict are inevitable, violence "is part of our design" and human nature is not compatible with socialist or egalitarian political arrangements.

According to evolutionary psychologists, basic features of human psychology were hardwired into the

brains of our ancestors by natural selection to enable them to survive the conditions faced by early humans. If for tens of thousands of years our ancestors required social hierarchy, violence and a sexual division of labor to survive, then human nature would have evolved to include tendencies to behave in these ways.

While human environments have, of course, changed dramatically since the time of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, according to Pinker's hypothesis, our basic behavior has remained unchanged. But as Peggy Sanday and Brian Ferguson showed, the claims that violence and hierarchy were features of all early human societies and that gender roles have remained unchanged are mistaken.

More fundamentally, the idea that human nature is basically rigid and unchanging is incompatible with what we actually know about human evolution. The first modern humans are believed to have evolved in southern Africa a little over 100,000 years ago. According to Marta Lahr, a professor of evolutionary studies at Cambridge University, these creatures had "the potential of invention that we have. And I think that's actually what makes them modern—they [could] invent solutions to new problems."

Around 50,000 years ago, groups of modern humans began to migrate from Africa and disperse around the world, coming into contact with other similar species that had left Africa more than a million years earlier. Modern humans arrived in Europe around 35,000 years ago, where they lived side by side with Neanderthals, a closely related but distinct human species.

Neanderthals, unlike modern humans, were physiologically well adapted to the cold European climate, but they were cognitively inferior to our ancestors—that is, their brains had a lower capacity for intelligence. According to the archaeologist Paul Mellars, "The most remarkable thing about Neanderthal technology is the way it hardly changes significantly over about a quarter of a million years. You get essentially the same shapes of tools made by the same techniques over this whole period."

"Now as soon as you get modern humans on the scene, you get a whole range of dramatic changes. They suddenly start producing new shapes of stone tools obviously designed for different functions, and they start producing tools from bones, antler and ivory, which had never been used before." It was this creativity and ingenuity of our ancestors—also exhibited in their elaborate ornaments, art and burial rituals, and the complex networks of trade and exchange they established—that explains why they survived and the Neanderthals did not.

When temperatures in Europe began to plummet with the onset of a new ice age, Neanderthals were unable to adjust to the new conditions. But modern humans continued to thrive, even in mountainous areas. By 28,000 years ago, the last remaining Neanderthals had disappeared. Similar developments took place around the world, where modern humans replaced other similar species.

Thus, the key to our ancestors' success was their enormous flexibility and ability to learn, not patterns of behavior hardwired into their brains. To claim this is not—as Pinker seems to assume—to say that the human mind is simply a "blank slate," or that there are no biological constraints on human behavior.

As the biologist Stephen Jay Gould once noted, "We would lead very different social lives if we photosynthesized (no agriculture, gathering, or hunting—the major determinants of our social evolution) or had life cycles like...gall midges," which devour their mothers' bodies from the inside. Nevertheless, our biological inheritance leaves open an enormous range of possible behaviors.

As Gould put it:

"Why imagine that specific genes for aggression or spite have any importance when we know that the brain's enormous flexibility permits us to be aggressive or peaceful, dominant or submissive, spiteful or generous? Violence, sexism and general nastiness are biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviors. But peacefulness, equality and kindness are just as biological—and we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish."

Human beings have basic physical and emotional needs—for food and shelter, for social contact and affection—which all too often go unmet under capitalism. But we also have a need to exercise control over our own lives and to engage in activities that make use of our creative abilities. Capitalism, like other forms

of class society, frustrates these needs, leading those who are exploited to fight back against it.

In different circumstances, people behave differently. But this doesn't mean that people are simply unalterable products of their society. Workers have the collective capacity to change the circumstances in which they live. In the process of doing so, they change themselves.

As Karl Marx wrote, "Revolution is necessary not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the old crap and become fitted to found society anew."

Socialism thus means not just a new form of society, but a new form of human consciousness, free from the distorting pressures of capitalism. Only in this way will the human capacity for self-determination finally become a reality.

Understanding history

Ideas by themselves cannot change society. This was one of Marx's first conclusions. Like a number of thinkers before him, he insisted that to understand society you had to see human beings as part of the material world.

Human behaviour was determined by material forces, just like the behaviour of any other natural object. The study of humanity was part of the scientific study of the natural world. Thinkers with such views were called materialists.

Marx regarded materialism as a great step forward over the various religious and idealist notions of history. It meant that you could argue scientifically about changing social conditions, you no longer depended on praying to God or on 'spiritual change' in people.

The replacement of idealism by materialism was the replacement of mysticism by science. But not all materialist explanations of human behaviour are correct. Just as there have been mistaken scientific theories in biology, chemistry or physics, so there have been mistaken attempts to develop scientific theories of society. Here are a few examples:

One very widespread, non-Marxist, materialist view holds that human beings are animals, who behave 'naturally' in certain ways. Just as it is in the nature of wolves to kill or in the nature of sheep to be placid, so it is in the nature of men to be aggressive, domineering, competitive and greedy (and, it is implied, of women to be meek, submissive, deferential and passive).

One formulation of this view is to be found in the best selling book *The Naked Ape*. The conclusions that are drawn from such arguments are almost invariably reactionary. If men are naturally aggressive, it is said, then there is no point in trying to improve society. Things will always turn out the same. Revolutions will 'always fail'.

But 'human nature' does in fact vary from society to society. For instance, competitiveness, which is taken for granted in our society, hardly existed in many previous societies. When scientists first tried to give Sioux Indians IQ tests, they found that the Indians could not understand why they should not help each other do the answers. The society they lived in stressed cooperation, not competition.

The same with aggressiveness. When Eskimos first met Europeans, they could not make any sense whatsoever of the notion of 'war'. The idea of one group of people trying to wipe out another group of people seemed crazy to them.

In our society it is regarded as 'natural' that parents should love and protect their children. Yet in the Ancient Greek city of Sparta it was regarded as 'natural' to leave infants out in the mountains to see if they

could survive the cold.

'Unchanging human nature' theories provide no explanation for the great events of history. The pyramids of Egypt, the splendours of Ancient Greece, the empires of Rome or the Incas, the modern industrial city, are put on the same level as the illiterate peasants who lived in the mud hovels of the Dark Ages. All that matters is the 'naked ape'—not the magnificent civilisations the ape has built. It is irrelevant that some forms of society succeed in feeding the 'apes', while others leave millions to starve to death.

Many people accept a different materialist theory, which stresses the way it is possible to change human behaviour. Just as animals can be trained to behave differently in a circus to a jungle, so, say the supporters of this view, human behaviour can similarly be changed. If only the right people got control of society, it is said, then 'human nature' could be transformed.

This view is certainly a great step forward from the 'naked ape'. But as an explanation of how society as a whole can be changed it fails. If everyone is completely conditioned in present-day society, how can anyone ever rise above society and see how to change the conditioning mechanisms? Is there some God-ordained minority that is magically immune to the pressures that dominate everyone else? If we are all animals in the circus, who can be the lion tamer?

Those who hold this theory either end up saying society cannot change (like the naked apes) or they believe change is produced by something outside society—by God, or a 'great man', or the power of individual ideas. Their 'materialism' lets a new version of idealism in through the back door.

As Marx pointed out, this doctrine necessarily ends up by dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. This 'materialist' view is often reactionary. One of the best known adherents of the view today is a right wing American psychologist called Skinner. He wants to condition people to behave in certain ways. But since he himself is a product of American capitalist society, his 'conditioning' merely means trying to make people conform to that society.

Another materialist view blames all the misery in the world on 'population pressure'. (This is usually called Malthusian after Malthus, the English economist of the late 18th century who first developed it.) But it cannot explain why the United States, for instance, burns corn while people in India starve. Nor can it explain why 150 years ago there was not enough food produced in the US to feed 10 million people, while today enough is produced to feed 200 million.

It forgets that every extra mouth to feed is also an extra person capable of working and creating wealth.

Marx called all these mistaken explanations forms of 'mechanical' or 'crude' materialism. They all forget that as well as being part of the material world, human beings are also acting, living creatures whose actions change it.

The materialist interpretation of history

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence—their food, shelter and clothing.

With these words, Karl Marx first stressed what was distinct about his explanation of how society developed. Human beings are animals descended from ape-like creatures. Like other animals, their first concern is feeding themselves and protecting themselves from the climate.

The way other animals do this depends on their inherited biological make up. A wolf stays alive by chasing and killing its prey, in ways determined by its biologically inherited instincts. It keeps warm on cold nights because of its fur. It brings up its cubs according to inherited patterns of behaviour.

But human life is not fixed in this way. The humans who roamed the Earth 100,000 years ago or 30,000 years ago lived quite different lives from ourselves. They lived in caves and holes in the ground. They did not have any containers to keep food or water in, they depended for their food on collecting berries or throwing stones at wild animals. They could not write, or count beyond the fingers on their hands. They had no real

knowledge of what went on beyond their immediate neighbourhood or what their forefathers had done.

Yet physically their make up 100,000 years ago was similar to that of modern man and 30,000 years ago it was identical. If you washed and shaved a caveman, put him in a suit and walked him down the high street, no one would think him out of place.

As the archaeologist C. Gordon Childe has noted:

The earliest skeletons of our own species belong to the closing phases of the last Ice Age ... Since the time when skeletons of *Homo sapiens* first appear in the geological record ... man's bodily evolution has come virtually to a standstill, although his cultural progress was just beginning.

The same point is made by another archaeologist, Leakey:

The physical differences between men of the Aurignacian and Magdalenian cultures (25,000 years ago) on the one hand, and present day men on the other is negligible, while the cultural difference is immeasurable.

By 'culture' the archaeologist means the things which men and women learn and teach one another (how to make clothes from furs or wool, how to make pots out of clay, how to make fire, how to build homes, and so forth) as opposed to those things that animals know instinctively.

The lives of the earliest humans were already vastly different from those of other animals. For they were able to use the physical features peculiar to humans—large brains, forelimbs capable of manipulating objects—to begin to shape their surroundings to suit their needs. This meant humans could adapt themselves to a wide range of different conditions, without any change in their physical make up. Humans no longer simply reacted to conditions around them. They could act upon those conditions, beginning to change them to their own advantage.

At first they used sticks and stones to attack wild beasts, they lit torches from naturally occurring fires to provide themselves with heat and light, they covered themselves with vegetation and animal skins. Over many tens of thousands of years they learnt to make fire themselves, to shape stones using other stones, eventually to grow food from seeds they themselves had planted, to store it in pots made out of clay, and to domesticate certain animals.

Comparatively recently—a mere 5,000 years ago, out of half a million years of human history—they learnt the secret of turning ores into metals that could be shaped into reliable tools and effective weapons.

Each of these advances had an enormous impact, not merely in making it easier for humans to feed and clothe themselves, but also in transforming the very organisation of human life itself. From the beginning human life was social. Only the joint efforts of several humans could enable them to kill the beasts, to gather the food and keep the fires going. They had to cooperate.

This continual close cooperation also caused them to communicate, by uttering sounds and developing languages. At first the social groups were simple. There was not enough naturally growing produce anywhere to support groups of humans more than perhaps a couple of dozen strong. All effort had to be put into the basic tasks of getting the food, so everyone did the same job and lived the same sort of life.

With no means of storing any quantities of food, there could be no private property or class divisions, nor was there any booty to produce a motive for war.

There were, until a few years ago, still hundreds of societies in many different parts of the globe where this was still the pattern—among some of the Indians of North and South America, some of the peoples of Equatorial Africa and the Pacific Ocean, the Aborigines of Australia.

Not that these people were less clever than ourselves or had a more 'primitive mentality'. The Australian Aborigines, for instance, had to learn to recognise literally thousands of plants and the habits of scores of different animals in order to survive. The anthropologist Professor Firth has described how:

Australian tribes ... know the habits, markings, breeding grounds and seasonal fluctuations of all the edible animals, fish and birds of their hunting grounds. They know the external and some of the less

obvious properties of rocks, stones, waxes, gums, plants, fibres and barks; they know how to make fire; they know how to apply heat to relieve pain, stop bleeding and delay the putrefaction of fresh food; and they also use fire and heat to harden some woods and soften others ... They know something at least of the phases of the moon, the movement of the tides, the planetary cycles, and the sequence and duration of the seasons; they have correlated together such climatic fluctuations as wind systems, annual patterns of humidity and temperature and fluxes in the growth and presence of natural species ... In addition they make intelligent and economical use of the by-products of animals killed for food; the flesh of the kangaroo is eaten; the leg bones are used as fabricators for stone tools and as pins; the sinews become spear bindings; the claws are set into necklaces with wax and fibre; the fat is combined with red ochre as a cosmetic, and blood is mixed with charcoal as paint... They have some knowledge of simple mechanical principles and will trim a boomerang again and again to give it the correct curve...

They were much more 'clever' than us in dealing with the problems of surviving in the Australian desert. What they had not learnt was to plant seeds and grow their own food—something our own ancestors learnt only about 5,000 years ago, after being on the Earth for 100 times that period.

The development of new techniques of producing wealth—the means of human life—has always given birth to new forms of cooperation between humans, to new social relations.

For example, when people first learnt to grow their own food (by planting seeds and domesticating animals) and to store it (in earthenware pots) there was a complete revolution in social life—called by archaeologists 'the neolithic revolution'. Humans had to cooperate together now to clear the land and to harvest food, as well as to hunt animals. They could live together in much greater numbers than before, they could store food and they could begin to exchange goods with other settlements.

The first towns could develop. For the first time there was the possibility of some people leading lives that did not involve them just in providing food: some would specialise in making pots, some in mining flints and later metal for tools and weapons, some in carrying through elementary administrative tasks for the settlement as a whole. More ominously, the stored surplus of food provided a motive for war.

People had begun by discovering new ways of dealing with the world around them, or harnessing nature to their needs. But in the process, without intending it, they had transformed the society in which they lived and with it their own lives. Marx summed up this process: a development of the 'forces of production' changed the 'relations of production' and, through them, society.

There are many more recent examples. Some 300 years ago the vast majority of people in this country still lived on the land, producing food by techniques that had not changed for centuries. Their mental horizon was bounded by the local village and their ideas very much influenced by the local church. The vast majority did not need to read and write, and never learned to.

Then, 200 years ago, industry began to develop. Tens of thousands of people were drawn into the factories. Their lives underwent a complete transformation. Now they lived in great towns, not small villages. They needed to learn skills undreamt of by their ancestors, including eventually the ability to read and write. Railways and steamships made it possible to travel across half the Earth. The old ideas hammered into their heads by the priests no longer fitted at all. The material revolution in production was also a revolution in the way they lived and in the ideas they had.

Similar changes are still affecting vast numbers of people. Look at the way people from villages in Bangladesh or Turkey have been drawn to the factories of England or Germany seeking work. Look at the way many find that their old customs and religious attitudes no longer fit.

Or look at the way in the past 50 years the majority of women have got used to working outside the home and how this has led them to challenge the old attitude that they were virtually the property of their husbands.

Changes in the way humans work together to produce the things that feed, clothe and shelter them cause changes in the way in which society is organised and the attitude of people in it. This is the secret of social

change—of history—that the thinkers before Marx (and many since), the idealists and the mechanical materialists, could not understand.

The idealists saw there was change—but said it must come out of the skies. The mechanical materialists saw that humans were conditioned by the material world but could not understand how things could ever change. What Marx saw was that human beings are conditioned by the world around them, but that they react back upon the world, working on it so as to make it more habitable. But in doing so they change the conditions under which they live and therefore themselves as well.

The key to understanding change in society lies in understanding how human beings cope with the problem of creating their food, shelter and clothing. That was Marx's starting point. But that does not mean Marxists believe that improvements in technology automatically produce a better society, or even that inventions automatically lead to changes in society. Marx rejected this view (sometimes called technological determinism). Again and again in history, people have rejected ideas for advancing the production of food, shelter or clothing because these clash with the attitudes or the forms of society that already exist.

For example, under the Roman Empire there were many ideas about how to produce more crops from a given amount of ground, but people didn't put them into effect because they required more devotion to work than you could get from slaves working under fear of the whip. When the British ruled Ireland in the 18th century they tried to stop the development of industry there because it clashed with the interests of businessmen in London.

If someone produced a method of solving the food problem of India by slaughtering the sacred cows or providing everyone in Britain with succulent steaks by processing rat meat, they would be ignored because of established prejudices.

Developments in production challenge old prejudices and old ways of organising society, but they do not automatically overthrow those old prejudices and social forms. Many human beings fight to prevent change—and those wanting to use new methods of production have to fight/or change. If those who oppose change win, then the new forms of production cannot come into operation and production stagnates or even goes backwards.

In Marxist terminology: as the forces of production develop they clash with the pre-existing social relations and ideas that grew up on the basis of old forces of production. Either people identified with the new forces of production win this clash, or those identified with the old system do. In the one case, society moves forward, in the other it remains stuck in a rut, or even goes backwards.

Class struggle

We live in a society that is divided into classes, in which a few people have vast amounts of private property, and most of us have virtually none. Naturally, we tend to take it for granted that things have always been like this.

But in fact, for the greater part of human history, there were no classes, no private property, and no armies or police. This was the situation during the half a million years of human development up to 5,000 or 10,000 years ago.

Until more food could be produced by one person's work than was needed to keep that person fit for work, there could be no division into classes. What was the point of keeping slaves if all that they produced was needed to keep them alive?

But beyond a certain point, the advance of production made class divisions not only possible but necessary. Enough food could be produced to leave a surplus after the immediate producers had taken enough to stay alive. And the means existed to store this food and to transport it from one place to another.

The people whose labour produced all this food could simply have eaten the extra 'surplus' food. Since they lived fairly meagre, miserable lives, they were strongly tempted. But that left them unprotected against the ravages of nature, which might lean famine or a flood the next year, and against attacks from angry tribes from outside the area.

It was, at first, of great advantage to everyone if a special group of people took charge of this extra wealth, storing it against future disaster, using it to support craftsmen, building up means defence, exchanging part of it with distant peoples for useful objects. These activities came to be carried out in the first towns, where administrators, merchants and craftsmen lived. Out of the markings on tablets used to keep a record of the different sorts of wealth, writing began to develop.

Such were the first, faltering steps of what we call 'civilisation'. But—and it was a very big but—all this was based on control of the increased wealth by a small minority of the population. And the minority used the wealth for its own good as well as the good of society as a whole.

The more production developed, the more wealth came into the hands of this minority—and the more it became cut off from the rest of society. Rules, which began as a means of benefiting society, became 'laws', insisting that the wealth and the land that produced it was the 'private property' of the minority. A ruling class had come into existence—and laws defended its power.

You might perhaps ask whether it would have been possible for society to have developed otherwise, for those who laboured on the land to control its produce?

The answer has to be no. Not because of 'human nature', but because society was still very poor. The majority of the Earth's population were too busy scratching the soil for a meagre living to have time to develop systems of writing and reading, to create works of art, to build ships for trade, to plot the course of the stars, to discover the rudiments of mathematics, to work out when rivers would flood or how irrigation channels should be constructed. These things could only happen if some of the necessities of life were seized from the mass of the population and used to maintain a privileged minority which did not have to toil from sunrise to sunset.

However, that does not mean that the division into classes remains necessary today. The last century has seen a development of production undreamt of in the previous history of humanity. Natural scarcity has been overcome—what now exists is artificial scarcity, created as governments destroy food stocks.

Class society today is holding humanity back, not leading it forward.

It was not just the first change from purely agricultural societies to societies of towns and cities that gave rise, necessarily, to new class divisions. The same process was repeated every time new ways of producing wealth began to develop.

So, in Britain 1,000 years ago, the ruling class was made up of feudal barons who controlled the land and lived off the backs of the serfs. But as trade began to develop on a big scale, there grew up alongside them in the cities a new privileged class of wealthy merchants. And when industry began to develop on a substantial scale, their power in turn was disputed by the owners of industrial enterprises.

At each stage in the development of society there was an oppressed class whose physical labour created the wealth, and a ruling class who controlled that wealth. But as society developed both the oppressed and the oppressors underwent changes.

In the slave society of Ancient Rome the slaves were the personal property of the ruling class. The slave owner owned the goods produced by the slave because he owned the slave, in exactly the same way as he owned the milk produced by a cow because he owned the cow.

In the feudal society of the Middle Ages the serfs had their own land, and owned what was produced from it; but in return for having this land they had to do a number of days work every year on the land owned by the feudal lord. Their time would be divided—perhaps half their time they would be working for the lord, half the time for themselves. If they refused to do work for the lord, he was entitled to punish them (through flogging, imprisonment or worse).

In modern capitalist society the boss does not physically own the worker nor is he entitled to physically punish a worker who refuses to do unpaid work for him. But the boss does own the factories where the worker has to get a job if he or she wants to keep alive. So it is fairly easy for him to force the worker to put up with a wage which is much less than the value of the goods the worker makes in the factory.

In each case the oppressing class gets control of all the wealth that is left over once the most elementary needs of the workers have been met. The slave owner wants to keep his property in a good condition, so he feeds his slave in exactly the same way as you might oil your car. But everything surplus to the physical needs of the slave, the owner uses for his own enjoyment. The feudal serf has to feed and clothe himself with the work he puts in on his own bit of land. All the extra labour he puts in on the lord's fields goes to the lord.

The modern worker gets paid a wage. All the other wealth he creates goes to the employing class as profit, interest or rent.

The class struggle and the state

The workers have rarely accepted their lot without fighting back. There were slave revolts in Ancient Egypt and Rome, peasant revolts in Imperial China, civil wars between the rich and poor in the cities of Ancient Greece, in Rome and Renaissance Europe.

That is why Karl Marx began his pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto* by insisting, 'The history of all hitherto existing societies has been the history of class struggles.' The growth of civilisation had depended on the exploitation of one class by another, and therefore on the struggle between them.

However powerful an Egyptian pharaoh, a Roman emperor or a medieval prince, however luxurious their lives, however magnificent their palaces, they could do nothing unless they guaranteed that the products grown by the most miserable peasant or slave passed into their possession. They could only do this if alongside the division into classes there also grew something else—control over the means of violence by themselves and their supporters.

In earlier societies there had been no army, police or governmental apparatus separate from the majority of the people. Even some 50 or 60 years ago, for instance, in parts of Africa, it was still possible to find societies in which this was still so. Many of the tasks done by the state in our society were simply done informally by the whole population, or by meetings of representatives.

Such meetings would judge the behaviour of any individual who was considered to have broken an important social rule. Punishment would be applied by the whole community—for instance by forcing miscreants to leave. Since everyone was agreed on the necessary punishment, separate police were not needed to put it into effect. If warfare occurred all the young men would take part, under leaders chosen for the occasion, again without any separate army structure.

But once you had a society in which a minority had control over most of the wealth, these simple ways of keeping 'law and order' and organising warfare could no longer work. Any meeting of representatives or any gathering of the armed young men would be likely to split along class lines.

The privileged group could only survive if it began to monopolise in its own hands the making and implementation of punishments, laws, the organisation of armies, the production of weapons. So the separation into classes was accompanied by the growth of groups of judges, policemen and secret policemen, generals, bureaucrats—all of whom were given part of the wealth in the hands of the privileged class in return for protecting its rule.

Those who served in the ranks of this 'state' were trained to obey without hesitation the orders of their 'superiors' and were cut off from all normal social ties with the exploited mass of people. The state developed as a killing machine in the hands of the privileged class. And a highly effective machine it could be.

Of course, the generals who ran this machine often fell out with a particular emperor or king, and tried to put themselves in his place. The ruling class, having armed a monster, could often not control it. But since

the wealth needed to keep the killing machine running came from the exploitation of the working masses, every such revolt would be followed by continuation of society along the old lines.

Throughout history people who have really wanted to change society for the better have found themselves up against not just the privileged class, but also an armed machine, a state, that serves its interest.

Ruling classes, together with the priests, generals, policemen and legal systems that backed them up, all grew up in the first place because without them civilisation could not develop. But once they are established in power, they come to have an interest in hindering the further development of civilisation. Their power is dependent upon their ability to force those who produce wealth to hand it over to them. They become wary of new ways of producing wealth, even if more efficient than the old, lest control escape from their hands.

They fear anything that could lead to the exploited masses developing initiative and independence. And they also fear the growth of new privileged groups with enough wealth to be able to pay for arms and armies of their own. Beyond a certain point, instead of aiding the development of production, they began to hinder it.

For example, in the Chinese Empire, the power of the ruling class rested upon its ownership of the land and its control over the canals and dams that were necessary for irrigation and to avoid floods. This control laid the basis for a civilisation that lasted some 2,000 years. But at the end of this period production was not much more advanced than at the beginning—despite the flourishing of Chinese art, the discovery of printing and gunpowder, all at a time when Europe was stuck in the Dark Ages.

The reason was that when new forms of production did begin to develop, it was in towns, through the initiative of merchants and craftsmen. The ruling class feared this growth in power of a social grouping that was not completely under its control. So periodically the imperial authorities took harsh measures to crush the growing economies of the towns, to drive production down, and to destroy the power of the new social classes.

The growth of new forces of production—of new ways of producing wealth—clashed with the interests of the old ruling class. A struggle developed, the outcome of which determined the whole future of society.

Sometimes the outcome, as in China, was that new forms of production were prevented from emerging, and society remained more or less stagnant for very long periods of time.

Sometimes, as in the Roman Empire, the inability of new forms of production to develop meant that eventually there was no longer enough wealth being produced to maintain society on its old basis. Civilisation collapsed, the cities were destroyed and people reverted to a crude, agricultural form of society.

Sometimes a new class, based upon a new form of production, was able to organise to weaken and finally overthrow the old ruling class, together with its legal system, its armies, its ideology, its religion. Then society could go forward.

In each case whether society went forwards or backwards depended on who won the war between the classes. And, as in any war, victory was not ordained in advance, but depended on the organisation, cohesion and leadership of the rival classes.

Working Class or Multitude

A speech by Chris Harman (editor of International Socialism Journal)

What I want to start by saying is how absolutely important this debate is. It is now just over three years since the new movement around globalisation bust on the scene at Seattle. Since then we have had the great battle at Genoa, we've had September 11th, we've been through the war against Afghanistan and we have the expectation of the world's greatest power directing its armed might against a poor third world

country in the next four or five weeks. For all of us the centrality of agitating against the war is there.

The very development of the movement is increasingly raising the feeling among us that not only is another world possible, but another world is necessary. This raises the question of how we get it. How do we gather the forces that are necessary to transform the situation?

Historically at this stage many movements in the past have found it important to take up the ideas of Karl Marx. The reason is simple enough. Writing when capitalism as a system was beginning to take its hold on small parts of western Europe and the eastern seaboard of North America in the 1840, 1850 and 1860s, Marx began to analyse what this system was and, above all, how to change it.

I only want to focus one element—how Marx placed at the centre of the debate the understanding that capitalism itself creates a force that can potentially grow up in opposition to it and overthrow it. This force is the working class.

Underlying this conception of the working class are four elements.

The first is that capitalism's basic motivating force is the seizure of people's labour—what Marx called their surplus value—which individual capitals then accumulate in competition with each other, so that the whole reality of the system is that is based upon the alienated labour, the stolen labour, of people who work.

The second element is that the dynamics of the system lead to the concentration of the forces that are based on accumulated labour, stolen labour, and the creation of massive workplaces in massive industrial conurbation's, huge cities, that become the centres of the system.

The third element is precisely because workers are concentrated together like this, when they fight against the system they are forced to fight on a collective manner, not an individualistic manner. They can be individualistic and not fight against the system. It happens all the time. But when they want to fight to improve their own conditions they have to fight collectively.

Here they differ from the oppressed classes of previous class societies. The medieval peasants could imagine that the peasant family could individually get more land and improve its conditions. In the world today there are still many hundreds of millions of peasants and of small proprietors, each of whom imagines that their family could grab more land or more of the market that they could improve their positions individually. Marx's central notion is that workers are forced to fight collectively, whether they fight in the factory or at the level of the whole society. They do not fight collectively all the time. Marx described how they are driven to fight collectively, they suffer defeats, they fragment and then are forced again to fight collectively.

The last element in Marx's conception is that because capitalism is based upon competition between rival capitals, so that each of them has all the time to try to raise the productivity of labour, this mean the capitalist class needs an exploited class that has much more culture than any oppressed class previously in history. It needs to be able to read and write, to have some basic knowledge of the world, in the modern world they need a working class increasingly that has some limited notion of IT, of computers, and so forth.

These are the four characteristics that Marx points to. He says that they create at the heart of capitalism a force that has the potential to fight the system. It does not fight the system all the time. But it has the potential to fight the system.

Against this, whenever we have been through periods of defeats of struggles, theorists have arisen who have said it is not the working class that is at the centre, but some other force. In the late 1970s and the 1980s world wide we went through a defeat for the working class struggles—the defeat in Chile, the formation in Europe of various social democratic governments that brought back the market, that began to break up welfare systems, the bloody dictatorship in Argentina, a whole period of defeats for the working class movement. In any period of defeats the workers' organisations fragment, workers turn upon each other, people see individual solutions, in that situation theories arise which say the working class is no longer central and that there is some other agency we can turn to.

So a man called Andre Gorz wrote a book some 20 years ago called 'Farewell to the working class' which

put across these ideas.

As far as I am concerned we are now in a new period of struggle internationally. In some countries it is more advanced than in others. In some the crisis of the system is much greater than in others. But we are talking about a new wave of struggles of which the anti-capitalist movement and the anti-war movement are part. In this new wave of struggles people are beginning to look for new answers.

One set of ideas put forward are in the book produced by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri called *Empire*. One of the central ideas is that we can no longer look to the working class as an agency of change, we have to talk about something else.

What I want to do briefly is to test that hypothesis against certain factual information, and then come to some conclusions. I've written a 15000 word article on the question and I don't intend to read it out to you.

But the central argument in the Hardt and Negri book is that the working class is beginning to disappear, that the old notion of Marx of people concentrated together in large workplaces, where their time is measured against the clock, where their lives are fragmented between the time in which they work, when they are effectively prisoners inside the factory of the office, and the free time have to recuperate from their work, Hardt and Negri want to argue this is no longer the case.

Their central argument is expressed in a long quote I want to give here—and I hope you will bear with me while I read it.

'In a previous era the category of the proletariat centred on and at times was effectively subsumed under the industrial working class. Today that working class has all but disappeared from view. It has not ceased to exist but it has been displaced from its central position in the capitalism economy'

They go on to claim that everyone under capitalism is part of the system and that therefore everyone under capitalism is equally central to the struggle against it.

I would argue empirically there is no empirical evidence whatsoever for this notion of the disappearing working class.

Here are a few facts.

We have been witnessing, world wide, changes in capitalism over the last quarter of century. This should not surprise us. The whole history of capitalism has been of change, with new areas of production advancing and old areas disappearing. The process always takes the form of the advance of capitalism drawing people into new workplaces, at a higher level than in the period before. This exactly true of the present period.

If we talk about the disappearance of the traditional working class in manufacturing, mining, and so forth. The reality is that this is not a class that is disappearing. I just want to give a few figures from what is still the world's biggest economy, the United States. At the end of the 1970s there was a panic in the United States with people talking about 'deindustrialisation'. But in 1998 the number of people working in industry in the United States was 20 per cent higher than in 1974, roughly; 50 per cent higher than in 1950 and it was four times the level of 1900. There was this continual growth in the number of workers in old style industries—mining, manufacturing and so forth. It is true that the total number employed in the economy as a whole grew more rapidly than that. But the absolute size of the traditional industrial working class—if you want to use the Spanish term, the obreros as opposed to the trabajadores—continued to grow right up until the beginning of the recession that began two years ago.

If you talk about the Japanese industrial working class, you are talking about a working class that grew massively in the last half century. I don't know the figures for last three or four years, but in 1998 it was bigger than in 1970 and in 1970 it was much, much bigger than in 1950.

It is true that if you talk about some European countries the picture is slightly different. The number of workers in manufacturing industry in Britain, for example, was halved during the last three recessions. The number of people in manufacturing jobs in France has fallen by about a third, in Italy by about 20 per cent.

But a fall of 20 per cent is not a disappearance of this category. There is continual growth of the number of people in 'traditional' industries world wide.

But alongside this has gone the vast expansion in the number of people in paid employment. Again I want to give figures for the advanced industrial countries, because they provide some indication of what the general trend is.

Here Hardt and Negri made a great deal of growth of what they call service employment and they give the impression that service employment is all what they call 'informational' employment—employment to do with the processing of information.

The reality of service employment is very different. People confuse the categories of industry and services with the categories of manual work and white collar work. But the services have always included very large numbers of manual workers. Dockers are service workers. Bus workers are service workers. Train drivers are service workers. If you look today at the United States there are 103 million people included in service employment. It is not true that all of these are informational workers, some sort of new category. There are 18 million in occupations with a decidedly manual cast to them—janitors, 'security personnel', 'food services', cleaners, people who to fill the shelves in shops, and so on. There are another 18 million in routine clerical jobs, terrible jobs in many ways indistinguishable from manual jobs, people involved in typing, filing and so and so forth. There are another six and three quarter million sales assistants, people working on checkouts at stores. Vast groups of workers whose jobs are as routines, as boring, as tiring, as devastating to their lives as any traditional manual work. Something like 42 million people altogether in such jobs in the United States.

Far from the working class disappearing, you put together 42 million of these jobs and the 30 million in old style manufacturing jobs and so forth you come to a figures that indicates that the majority of the population of the United States are still workers.

If you add to that other changes that are taking way, the way that jobs like teaching are increasingly subject to the payments systems that used to exist only in manufacturing or mining, payment by results, managerial supervision, managerial bullying, assessment procedures, stretching today in Britain today right up to the university level, you talking about the transformation involving more and more people being drawn into the old style of jobs. When people talk about informational jobs, I am more tempted to talk about Macjobs', of even teaching becoming almost a Macjob, part of a production line.

It is extremely problematic to talk about 'Fordism', a stage of mass production, giving way to 'post-Fordism' where mass production is finished. For me what is happening is the globalisation of Fordism. Someone working for Macdonalds is working for a Fordist enterprise in which everything is measured, everything is timed, everything is dominated by the methods and procedures that used to characterise industry.

One other thing should be said. It is often claimed that these jobs are all insecure jobs. It is said in Hardt and Negri that all these are jobs that could disappear overnight. Here we have to be careful. Everywhere those who employ workers want to create a feeling of insecurity among workers in order to break their ability to fight back. And to there has been over the last 20 or 30 years an increase in insecure employment. But it is also true that everywhere that capitalism exploits labour, it wants some degree of commitment from the workforce, some degree of stability to the workforce. And therefore you find in Europe 18 per cent of jobs are insecure jobs, 82 per cent of jobs are more or less permanent jobs. The average time for which people stay in the same job in Britain is the same now as ten years ago. This is important because the notion of insecure jobs is used in Britain by the New Labour government to say everyone has insecure jobs therefore you cannot fight to defend your job. For us it is important to understand that there insecurity and the attempt to create insecurity among workers. But at the same time there is a stable workforce that has the capacity to fight back.

I've talked so far about the situation at the centre of capitalism, the advanced industrial countries. I'll now talk briefly about the situation in the rest of the world.

The latest breakdown of the composition of the world's workforce was carried out in 1995 by Deon Filmer, for the World Bank, of all things. His break down shows about a third of people in paid employment, and about half still involved in self employment on the land.

But if you analyse the categories further, you find that in most third world countries today about half the people working the land for themselves are to some extent also dependent on waged labour. So about a third of the world's workforce are involved in classic capitalist relations of production, dependent completely on waged labour to survive, about a third remain self employed, mainly peasants in the countryside, and third who spend part of their time working for capital, part of the time working for themselves—and increasingly under the control of multinational trading corporations, supermarket chains, and so on.

Two simultaneous processes are changing this picture over time.

The first is the massive urbanisation of the world. In 1975, 37 per cent of the world's population lived in towns. In 1995, 45 per cent lived in towns, and estimates suggest that that if these trends continue in 15 year time half of the population of the third world will live in towns. There is massive urbanisation of the world's population.

Within that there is a trend where people who used to work the land are forced to seek work in large cities. But that transformation does not mean there is automatic growth of the permanent workforce.

In most parts of the world, there is a small growth of the permanent workforce and, alongside it, a massive growth of transitory workforce, of people who either live by the most meagre forms of self employment—selling matches, shoe laces, driving taxis, or sometimes selling their own bodies—and alongside them people who try to sell their labour on a casual basis.

But this exception of parts of Africa, the employed section of the workforce is not disappearing. It is growing larger. And the classic methods of capitalist control are still in existence. Even if you talk about Brazil you find in the 1980s there was a small growth in the permanent workforce. In the early 1990s it stagnated. In the mid 1990s it began to grow again, it is probably stagnating at the moment. There is an interaction between the growth of the casual workforce and the growth of the permanent workforce. The permanent workforce is not disappearing.

Why does all this argument matter?

The last thing I want to talk about is the politics involved.

Let's go back to the centre of Marx's conception. It is that workers who are concentrated together in large workplaces, under the thumb of managers, subject to time keeping, subject to the pressures continually to be disciplined by the system, at the same time have the potential when they struggle to shake the system, but not only to shake the system. They have the potential to organise themselves, because they are concentrated together. The culture capitalism itself forces on them let alone the culture of understand, creates the potential for becoming a force that can change the system. When they move, the move collectively.

When we talk about the picture of the world today, we have to say there are all sorts of movements that break out in the world today. The crisis of capitalism creates all sorts of pressures for revolts and rebellions. But it is not true that all these are collective struggles and they all lead to struggles in the same direction.

The notion of the multitude that Hardt and Negri put across implies that any struggle anywhere has the same weight and the same importance.

We have to say two things. Firstly, the whole history of revolts by peasants or by the urban poor who are not in workplaces is that they explode on to the streets and then they are driven back into their hovels or their farms and the revolt collapses. The history of the workers struggle is that when workers struggle and gain victories, they create collective organisations that persist over time and they begin to create to possibility of a counter-hegemony, a weapon against the system as a whole.

The second thing we have to say about the notion of multitude is that not all multitudes are progressive. I will just give the example of India.

In 1983, a massive textile strike shook Bombay. It probably the biggest strike the world has ever known and it lasted for 12 months with a million workers on strike. For that period collective ideas dominated the mass of poor people in and out of jobs in the Bombay area. That strike was defeated. In the aftermath of it what came to dominate in Bombay, rooted among the poor, the self employed and so forth, was what one might call a fascist organisation called the Shiv Sena, which directed the hatred of the middle castes against the lowest, the Dalits (untouchables), the hatred of Hindus against Muslims. In the same city, the same multitude of people subjugated to capital, their lives being ruined by the system, could turn in two directions. One to collective struggle, one to individualistic struggle. The collective struggle is beaten, the individualist struggle comes to the fore.

If you talk about multitude, either you've got the progressive multitude, whose position rooted in the system drives it forward to challenge the system, or you've got the reactionary multitude.

I'll give another example. Argentina. Thirteen months ago we saw the fantastic eruption of the population of Buenos Aires on the streets. We saw the multitude bring down the government. What the multitude was not capable of doing was framing some sort of alternative that was capable of stopping Argentine capitalism continuing to go into crisis. The central focus in Argentina, the working class organised in the workplaces was held back from entering into the struggle by the trade union bureaucracy. But unless you talk about the organised working class, those in workplaces with traditions of collective struggle, coming onto the stage in Argentina, you are talking about continuing paralysis of the struggle.

The last thing I want to talk about is Venezuela. We've had an epic conflict taking place there over the last five weeks. It is conflict between the rich and the poor. The rich are backed by the United States. The poor come on the streets in support of Chavez. But it has to be said the demonstrations behind the rich and the demonstrations behind the poor have been more or less equal in size—although people argue that the recent pro-Chavez demonstrations have been slightly larger.

When you just talk about multitudes, you can have a multitude to the left and a multitude to the right. You have to ask what is the dynamic that drives it forward and can carry it on. Unless you talk about people whose experience under capitalism forces them to act collectively and to provide collective alternative, you cannot talk about really changing the system.